Journal of Asia-Pacific Studies (Waseda University) No. 35 (January 2019)

Thoughts About the Institute's History

Paul F. Hooper[†]

One of the latter-20th century's major developments was the emergence of an Asian-Pacific challenge to the centuries long Eurocentric dominance of global affairs. The product of a complex mixture of historical, economic, demographic, and political factors, this process continued apace into the 21st century and is central to what is now understood as a changed world order.

Among the first organizations to recognize and promote this transformation in its earlier phases was the Institute of Pacific Relations, initially a study and discussion group for influential civic and business leaders from throughout the region concerned with developing regional issues. It thrived from its founding in 1925 until its collapse in the late 1950s, an unfortunate victim primarily of McCarthyism. It pioneered problem-oriented conferences that brought leaders from nearly all nations with Asian-Pacific interests together on a regular basis, drew unprecedented international press attention to the region, attracted sustained financial support from such philanthropic giants as the Rockefeller Foundation and the Carnegie Endowment for World Peace as well as substantial support from leading American, Japanese, and European businesses, and, perhaps most important over the long term, established a research and publication program that created much of the foundation underlying modern Asian and Pacific academic studies programs. As the late John King Fairbank, a towering 20th century figure in Asian studies, once observed, contemporary scholars in the field must be informed about the Institute if they are to understand their own academic roots. Others have expressed similar judgments with respect to its role in promoting regional diplomatic and intercultural relations.

The Institute's record of programmatic achievements over its some four decades of activity is the basis for this remarkable assessment. Following its initial international conference in 1925, it was formally organized with an international headquarters and staff located first in Honolulu and then in New York and regional councils with offices and staff in all the major Asian nations and those elsewhere with Asian-Pacific interests. Over time, this came to include Australia, Burma, Canada, China, France, Great Britain, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Pakistan, the Philippines, the Soviet Union (briefly), and the United States. Twelve subsequent international conferences were held between the first (in Honolulu) in 1925 and the last (in Lahore) in 1958, and these were buttressed by scores of national and regional gatherings. A research and publications program, initially intended simply to facilitate better informed conference discussions, evolved into an on-going effort eventually responsible for some sixteen hundred scholarly and popular publications as well as several respected

[†] Professor Emeritus, Department of American Studies, University of Hawaii at Manoa

scholarly journals, an achievement of major significance in light of the limited amount of serious material on the region then available. In the course of all this, a remarkable number of individual participants and staff gained the knowledge needed to build the era's developing academic studies programs. In sum, the Institute became a highly significant organization both as regards its own programs and concerns and as a fountainhead for other similarly concerned groups.

This being so, how is it that so few people in today's world appear to have even heard of the Institute and that there are so few contemporary references to it even in scholarly literature on the Asian-Pacific region? The answer to this question almost certainly lies in a combination of post WWII global power shifts and the rise of McCarthyism in America. While the immediate post-war world was a time of optimism about the chances for new, world-wide peaceful arrangements, it soon became a breeding ground for new doubts and suspicions, particularly with respect to the Soviet Union. The reasonably warm Soviet-Euro-American war years rapidly faded as the Soviets embarked upon what amounted to the colonization of eastern Europe and the transformation of their military into a nuclear-equipped force capable of global warfare, in the process changing from a wartime ally against the Nazis into a totalitarian threat to democracies everywhere. China, long considered a special friend by most Americans, came under the control of Mao's communists and became a bitter American foe, while newly communist North Korea engaged in open warfare in an attempt to unify the Korean peninsula under its rule. As the Alger Hiss case and related events further demonstrated, Soviet-sponsored efforts to undermine the governments of America and its European allies became an undeniable reality. In short, at least so far as many Americans were concerned, the world had suddenly shifted and they wanted an explanation. McCarthyism responded that all these developments were the result of a vast communist conspiracy throughout the world. Despite its often reckless charges, tendency to declare guilt simply by association, and frequent bullying of opponents, many, both outside and inside governmental circles, found McCarthyism's answer persuasive, and the movement rapidly became a major factor in American socio-political life.

Given its now substantial reputation as a well-informed source of information on Pacific regional issues, it is no surprise that the Institute came to the attention of McCarthy and his allies. In fact, the roots of this connection pre-date McCarthyism. It began with a heated wartime conflict between the United China Relief program, in which Institute Secretary General Edward O. Carter served as its program committee chair in addition to his regular duties with the IPR, and Alfred Kohlberg, an important figure in a different Chinese aid program as well as a participant in Institute activities. Kohlberg charged that the Institute was promoting activities that favored Mao's communists and hampered Chiang's nationalists. A contentious dispute arose which continued into the post-war period, and became a significant factor in McCarthy's activities after Kohlberg gave him—or so it appears—a collection of accusatory documents on Institute activities that his group had been assembling since the start of the dispute.

Growing public support, mounting evidence of questionable governmental decisions, and the de-

tailed confessions of former communists like Whittaker Chambers and Elizabeth Bentley, generated enough concern that American leaders were compelled to take the issue seriously, and the host of anti-communist internal security measures now central to the definition of McCarthyism were initiated. With respect to the Institute, the main impact of this new emphasis was a number of legislative committee hearings concerning its various activities which culminated in the highly publicized 1951–52 hearings conducted by Senator Patrick McCarran's Subcommittee on Internal Security.

These hearings raised what proved to be a fatal series of doubts, some legitimate and others not, about the Institute. Most sensational among these were charges that Institute activities were responsible for the "loss of China" and that Institute official Owen Lattimore was the Soviet Union's principal agent in the United States. While it goes almost without saying that charges of this nature were borderline ludicrous, the Institute and many of its supporters felt they nonetheless had to vigorously dispute them. However, the sensational nature of these claims within the increasingly tense Cold War atmosphere generated publicity and sentiment that overwhelmed everything the Institute and its supporters could produce in response. As a consequence, the McCarran report became central to most of what has since been written about the American branch of the Institute and, given the central role of the Americans in the Institute's overall activities, created what became the generally negative impression of the entire organization. Several more recent examples of this continuing portrayal are Ann Coulter's *Treason* (2003) and Stanton Evan's *Blacklisted by History* (2008). A small number of contemporary scholars, primarily from Japan and the United States, have continued to make the case for the Institute's essential innocence in all but the most minor of instances, but their articles and occasional books have attracted little interest from publishers and thus have reached only a small audience.

The goal of defending the Institute and returning it to a more appropriate place in Asian-Pacific history was further complicated in the mid-1990s when the Venona Project, a long secret WWII American program involving the interception and decoding of Soviet messages concerning its espionage activities, was declassified. Once the details became public, it became evident that a number of mid-level Institute participants had held decidedly pro-Soviet views and that some of them had been actual agents, complete with code names. While the Venona Project involved far more activities than just those of the Institute—among other things, it also strengthened the evidence against Alger Hiss and Julius Rosenberg—it made any general defense of the organization considerably more difficult. Further, although it established little evidence of actual espionage on the part of Institute-related individuals, still other investigations undertaken elsewhere did. The most prominent example in this regard involved Hotsume Ozaki, a respected Japanese Council participant who was found to be part of the Sorge spying operation in wartime Japan and was executed. In the United States two important Chinese staff members who served in the Institute's New York headquarters—Chen Han-seng and Ch'i Ch'ao-ting—were later found to have been secret members of the Chinese communist party throughout their years of Institute service. Fred Field, an American from the prominent Vanderbilt family, was both an important Institute official and an open advocate on behalf of numerous communist causes,

activities that led to his brief but well publicized imprisonment. Further, no one knows what may still remain buried in various archival collections. While none of these findings was sufficient to demonstrate that any Institute official ever undertook an act of espionage or that the organization was a front for communist machinations as McCarthy and his supporters believed, taken together they were sufficiently damning to cause the foundations and businesses that had long underwritten the group's funding to cease their support. The same is true for many of its individual participants, and the Institute was dissolved at the end of the decade.

All of these things have reduced the telling of the Institute's genuine story to an occasional item in academic research and even then usually as only an appendix to a larger discussion of Cold War tensions, McCarthyism, transcultural education, or similar topics. The few subsequent attempts to tell the group's larger and more accurate story have failed to attract publishers. Regrettably but understandable, this is not surprising. The McCarran-influenced view has prevailed and, given the Institute's own somewhat troubled record, there is little interest in what a small group of contemporary academics believe is a more appropriate view.

This is not, however, to suggest that there is no point in further scholarly research on the Institute. Thanks in good part to the efforts of Waseda University Professor Michio Yamaoka, the activities of the American and Japanese IPR Councils have been explored in numerous conference presentations, articles, and a few books, but the records of the other national councils are largely unknown and deserve more attention. The activities of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, which had an important relationship with those Institute councils in the Commonwealth countries, also should receive greater attention. A biographical sketch—or even a full biography—of Institute Secretary General Edward O. Carter should be undertaken and the same goes for several other prominent Institute leaders. The organization's record with respect to transcultural and gender issues may provide fruitful areas of application for more recently developed behavioral methodologies. Finally, the tendency to link the Institute's general collapse with McCarthyism and the collapse of the Americans Council probably should be questioned as the American unit was just one of over a dozen that composed the full organization. However, given the central role of the Americans in providing facilities, funding, staffing, and leadership, any change in the basic story as currently told will be difficult. In sum, while matters in need of further study remain, dreams of a new, stand-alone study returning the Institute to its earlier glory probably should be put aside. Any full discussion of the group's demise is, of historical necessity, too cloudy for that purpose. Thus there seems little likelihood of any new study on this now dated group, favorable or otherwise, ever appearing in bookshops or on library shelves. If so, a still fascinating and important story seems destined never to be fully and properly told.